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INFLUENCE OF SAFARICOM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS ON GROWTH OF MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES IN KENYA: A CASE OF NAIROBI CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

[1]EDWIN MURIMI CHOMBA, [2]Dr. Jared Deya

[1]College of Human Resource and Development, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, P.O Box 62000,00200 Nairobi, Kenya
[2]College of Human Resource and Development, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, P.O Box 62000,00200 Nairobi, Kenya
Corresponding Author email: chombamurimi@gmail.com

Abstract: **MSEs in Kenya are often faced with resource limitations that cause them to be vulnerable to various environmental changes. Consequently, most MSEs are unable to meet the high levels of customers' quality and service demands and to differentiate themselves from competitors particularly when competing against bigger companies. This has necessitated the need for strategic partnerships as an alternative way of gaining access to strategic resources in the alliance network and to gain competitive advantage. Alliances are expected to facilitate MSE access to resources, customers and markets which eventually results to a competitive advantage and MSE growth. Whereas most studies have focused on benefits from the large company perspective literature on MSE benefits are limited. The current study sought to determine benefits from the MSE perspective. The study sought to determine the influence of strategic alliances on the growth of MSEs in partnership with Safaricom along Moi Avenue in Nairobi based on four objectives; influence of technology development partnerships, franchise, outsourcing, marketing and distribution partnerships on the growth of MSEs in partnership with Safaricom, A descriptive survey design was adopted with a target population of 200 MSEs operating within Nairobi central Business district. 133 MSE businesses were sampled using Yamane (1967) formula. Data was collected using a questionnaire which was piloted to ensure validity and reliability. A Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated which gave an alpha value of 0.827. Data was processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics aided by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0. Relationships between independent and dependent variables were determined using cross tabulations. Findings revealed that; Technology partnerships were the least common among MSEs surveyed but those with this partnership had realized growth in their businesses to a large extent in terms of sales, profits and returns on investment. Franchise partnerships were the most popular and had also positively influenced MSE growth however the large number of licensed agents reduced the volume of transactions per business. Outsourcing and marketing partnerships were also found to exist amongst some MSEs which had positively influenced MSE growth. Recommendations made were; Safaricom to review evaluation criteria to accommodate more MSEs in technology development partnerships, number of Mpesa agents licensed should be limited based on the customer base in a given locality and government to enact laws to govern strategic alliances between MSEs and large companies.**

Keywords: **Technological Alliance, Franchise, Marketing and Distribution Partnerships, Outsourcing Partnerships, Strategic Partnerships.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study:

Economic growth and development in both developed and developing countries is largely attributed to small businesses. Reports further indicate that MSEs make important contributions to economic and social development, are majority of business establishments which provide majority of jobs created and account for one to two thirds of the turnover of the private sector in most economies (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development[OECD], 2005). MSEs also play an integral role in the Kenyan economy. For instance, Argidius (2015) reports that MSEs offer employment to an estimated 7.5 million people in Kenya, account for 80% of employment, contribute over 92% of the new jobs created annually and contribute about 45 % to Kenya's GDP. The Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2012) asserts that this sector has the potential to reduce poverty because of their low capital requirements in business startup. Therefore MSE growth generates more resources that contribute to more tax revenue, goods and services. Consequently, this sector is key in realizing and sustaining a 10% annual economic growth rate envisaged in Vision 2030.

Despite the numerous benefits of MSEs worldwide, these enterprises have a high mortality rate and hardly survive to celebrate their third birthday due to unique challenges which inhibit their growth and profitability and hence diminish their ability to contribute effectively to sustainable development. Policy briefs reports that less than one-half of small start-ups survive for more than five years, and only a fraction develop into the core group of high performance firms which drive industrial innovation and performance. Reasons for these failures are numerous including lack of finances, high competition, poor management skills, poor debt collection, lack of markets for their products and poor quality products among others (GOK, 2005; Argidius, 2015; KER, 2017). Further, even though MSEs account for 95% of firms in the manufacturing sector, their contribution to the GDP is only 20% (KIPPRA ,2017). To reverse this trend strategic alliances are increasingly being adopted by many corporations as a major vehicle for survival and as a way to promote MSE growth in this era of borderless competition. Firms have successfully used strategic partnerships as mechanisms to grow market, manage risk, differentiate, innovate, and enhance customer loyalty and performance thus gaining a competitive advantage (Muthoka & Oduor ; 2014).

Specific Objectives:

The study was guided by the following specific objectives.

i. To establish the influence of technology development partnerships on the growth of MSEs along Moi Avenue Nairobi central business district.

ii. To determine the influence of franchise partnerships on the growth MSEs along Moi Avenue Nairobi central business district.

iii. To investigate the influence of outsourcing partnerships on the growth of MSEs along Moi Avenue Nairobi central business district.

iv. To determine the influence of marketing partnerships on the growth of MSEs along Moi Avenue Nairobi central business district

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

According to Guthrie (2012) a research design is the plan that guides the research process to help identify the participants in the research and how data will be collected from them. In this study, the researcher adopted a descriptive survey design which is used to collect original data for a large population (Babbie& Mouton,2010) Survey design was preferable because; it gathers data on a one-shot basis and hence is economical and efficient, represents a wide target population, provides descriptive, inferential and explanatory, Information and manipulates key factors and variables to derive frequencies and correlations. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison ,2007).

Target Population:

The Target population which represents the sampling frame are Micro and Small Scale businesses (MSEs) in various partnerships with Safaricom. These were; those operating as Mpesa agents and retail stores with lipa na M*pesa* facilities as franchise partnerships. M kopa dealers and advertising agents with contracts with Safaricom as marketing partnerships, Contracted head office agents/Mpesa dealers to represent outsourcing contracts while those involved in innovations or new product development partnerships as technology partnerships. All MSEs targeted were those operating in Nairobi Central Business District along Moi Avenue. Business contracts data obtained from Safaricom indicate that about 200 businesses operate within Nairobi CBD along Moi Avenue.

Sample and Sampling Technique:

Respondents were selected from the target population using simple random sampling. This gave all MSEs in the stratum equal chance of being included in the sample reduces sampling errors (Kasomo, 2006). Yamane's formula (1967) was used to calculate the sample size of 133 MSE's managers.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{200}{1 + 200(0.05)^2} = 133.333333 \sim 133$$

Where, n = sample size, N = population size, e = level of precision.

The level of precision is the range in which the true value of the population is estimated to be; it is expressed in percentage points (±5%).

This sample size was thus calculated at 95% significance level.

The questionnaire tool was thus administered to the managers in the 133 MSEs sampled.

Data Collection Instruments:

Data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open ended questions. Closed questions are preferred with large sample sizes and also allowed the researcher to collect standardized information from the respondents (Cohen, 2007). The closed questions were designed on a Likert scale of 5-10 items. Likert scales are preferred when testing perceptions of respondents. A few open questions were asked to gain insights on how strategic partnerships had influenced the performance of MSEs in contractual relationship with Safaricom. Secondary data on the performance of MSEs was collected through desk research by scrutinizing partnership agreements and contract documents between Safaricom and MSEs, analyzing individual business financial statements of the target MSEs where possible, reading through industry reports, journal articles and government publications and status reports on strategic partnerships in Kenya.

3. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In collecting data, an introductory letter from the Graduate school of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology was obtained. The researcher then sought permission from the top management of each of the MSEs sampled to allow access to business documents and information. The questionnaire was then administered to the 133 managers on a drop and pick basis by the researcher in order to increase the response rate as recommended by Guthrie (2012).

Pilot Testing:

Piloting is used to ensure validity and reliability of research instruments. In this case ten (10) randomly selected respondents operating agency banking under Equity and KCB with similar characteristics as the target population were selected from Nairobi CBD and the questionnaire administered to them. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) recommend a sample of 10% as adequate for piloting. Responses were used to make the necessary corrections on the questionnaire instrument to ensure the questions were accurate, consistent and correctly captured the objectives of the study before carrying out the actual research.

Reliability and Validity of Research Instruments:

Reliability of a research instrument enhances its ability to measure consistently what is intended Kumar (2011) asserts that a scale or test is reliable to the extent that repeat measurements made by it under constant conditions will give the same result. Internal consistency reliability of the research instrument was measured by calculating the Cronbach's alpha which was then compared to recommended values. Field (2005) recommends an alpha value of 0.7 as reasonable in social

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research. Validity indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Kothari, 2004). Validity is best understood by asking the question "Are we measuring what we think we are measuring?"(Kerlinger,1973; Kumar,2011). Opinions of experts and peers were also used to assess the face and content validity of the research instruments. Their advice and suggestions were used to make the necessary changes to the questionnaire.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The filled questionnaires from the respondents were scrutinized to ensure completeness and consistency. Only dully filled questionnaires were used in the final analysis. The SPSS Version 21.0. was used to aid in data analysis. Frequencies and percentages were mainly used for quantitative data which was then presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts from which statistical inferences as well as necessary recommendations were made. Cross tabulations were used to determine the relationship between strategic partnerships and the performance of MSEs.

Reliability Analysis:

Test of reliability was done to ascertain if the questionnaires could enable collection of the needed information even when repeated severally. This helped detect weaknesses of the research instrument as to provide consistent and reliable data. The researcher selected a pilot group of nine respondents from the target population to test the reliability of the research instruments. Internal consistency techniques were applied using Cochran's Alpha. The alpha value ranges between zero and one with reliability increasing with the increase in value. Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) was of the opinion that, a Coefficient of 0.6 to 0.7 is a commonly accepted rule of thumb that indicates acceptable construct reliability and from the same line, the alpha values

Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics are brief descriptive coefficients that summarize a given data set. In this study these were the representation of the entire sample population. Descriptive statistics are broken down into measures of central tendency and measures of variability or spread. The statistics included means and standard deviations as follows:

Inferential Analysis:

Table 1: Strategic Technology Partnerships

	n=126									
Aspects on Technology Partnership	**NA**		**SE**		**ME**		**LE**		**VE**	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Staff acquired tacit knowledge from cooperation with Safaricom	0	0	0	0	2	33.3	4	**66.7**	0	0
Received financial support to commercialize innovations	0	0	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	**50.0**	0	0
We share Commercial and technical information on our joint projects with Safaricom	0	0	0	0	2	33.3	4	**66.7**	0	0
We share risks associated with this partnership	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	5	**83.3**	0	0
Have accessed technical and managerial expertise as a result of partnership with Safaricom	0	0	0	0	2	33.3	2	**33.3**	2	33.3
The partnership has enabled us access new opportunities for our business	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	**50.0**
The partnership has strengthened our entrepreneurial and innovative capacity	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	3	**50.0**	0	0
Our organization has increased our R&D level as a result of the partnership	0	0	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	**50.0**	0	0

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Table 2: Franchise Partnerships

Aspects on Franchise Partnerships	n=126 NA		SE		ME		LE		VE	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
We receive quality support from Safaricom	0	0	17	14.8	38	33.0	53	**46.1**	7	6.1
Safaricom brand has increased our customers and markets	0	0	41	**35.7**	34	29.6	33	28.7	7	6.1
Product quality has resulted to customer loyalty	0	0	2	1.7	38	33.0	68	**59.1**	7	6.1
Safaricom offers training and advertising support to our business	0	0	1	.9	32	27.8	75	**65.2**	7	6.1
Advertisements and sales promotion by Safaricom have resulted to increased sales for our business	0	0	1	.9	66	**57.4**	41	35.7	7	6.1
Our employees have acquired tacit knowledge from interactions with Safaricom staff	0	0	52	**45.2**	26	22.6	23	20.0	14	12.2
I have strong control over my business despite controls by Safaricom on product pricing and standardized services.	0	0	26	22.6	63	**54.8**	19	16.5	7	6.1
Investing in Safaricom franchise is less risky than investing in an independent business	0	0	1	.9	45	39.1	62	**53.9**	7	6.1
We share control of the franchise activities(No vetto powers)	0	0	58	**50.4**	23	20.0	27	23.5	7	6.1

Table 3: Outsourcing Partnerships

Aspects on Outsourcing Partnerships	n=126 NA		SE		ME		LE		VE	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Contracts received from Safaricom have enabled us operate at optimal capacity with reduced operational expenses	0	0	5	20.8	10	**41.7**	9	37.5	0	0
Through Safaricom contracts we are able to access new markets in their networks	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	**79.2**	5	20.8
We have attained economies of scale as a result of Safaricom contracts	0	0	0	0	10	41.7	14	**58.3**	0	0
As a result of Safaricom contracts we are able to concentrate on our core business	0	0	0	0	0	20.8	19	**79.2**	0	0
We have better financial accountability and management as a result of Safaricom partnerships	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	**58.3**	10	41.7
Staff productivity has improved due to specialization as we focus on core business	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	**100.0**	0	0
Through the contracts we are able to comply with regulatory requirements	0	0	15	**62.5**	0	0	9	37.5	0	0
Safaricom provides financial support to our business.	10	**41.7**	5	20.8	9	37.5	0	0	0	0
Through Safaricom vendor training we have improved the quality of our products	0	0	0	0	5	20.8	19	**79.2**	0	0

Out of the 126 respondents, 24 MSEs were found to have outsourcing partnerships with Safaricom translating to 19.05% of the businesses surveyed. These businesses were those contracted by Safaricom as dealers often called super agents or Head office agents to run the Safaricom agency banking and sale other Safaricom products including lines and airtime. For a business to be contracted as a dealer it must meet the following requirements; Registered as a company operating in Kenya, Deposit a minimum of 2 million Kenya shillings with Safaricom. Have financial capacity to recruit and pay field staff to monitor business performance of Mpesa outlets contracted .They are then given an initial batch of 17 lines to sale to those interested in running Mpesa agency banking. These dealers are then entitled to 5% commission of the total commissions earned by the Mpesa agents under their control. This study therefore sought to establish whether these contractual relationship had resulted to growth of their businesses as shown in Table 3.

Findings as shown in Table 3 indicate that on 6 out of the 9 aspects tested MSEs had benefited to a large extent (LE) from the outsourcing contracts by Safaricom. Specifically 79.2% indicated that Safaricom contracts had enabled them access new markets in their networks to a large extent, 58.3% had attained economies of scale to a large extent as a result of Safaricom contracts, A further 79.2 % indicated that they were able to concentrate on their core business as a result of Safaricom outsourcing contracts. 58.3 % of the respondents also revealed that their financial accountability and management had improved to a large extent with 41.7 agreeing that this was the case to a very large extent as a result of Safaricom partnerships. Moreover all the respondents (100%) agreed that their staff productivity had improved due to specialization as they focused on core business to a large extent while majority of the respondents (79.2%) also confirmed that Safaricom vendor training had improved the quality of their products to a large extent. These results confirm findings by Kamanga and Ismail (2016) who opine that outsourcing brings benefits such as; reduced costs of operation, frees up cash thus allowing investments on core activities, improves organization focus, frees management time and reduces staff costs as well as giving more organization flexibility. Most managers confirmed that the benefits of running the Safaricom dealer business outweighs the costs since the costs of advertising and vendor training are absorbed by Safaricom Company. The results support assertions by Möhlmann and De Groot (2010) that outsourcing can increase the productivity of firms if it reduces production costs more than it increases transaction costs.

On whether the outsourcing contracts had enabled them to comply with regulatory requirements, most respondents (62.5%) indicated that this had only happened to a small extent. This was because once contracted Safaricom does not monitor your compliance with the law but would only concentrate on the contract. However the requirement to have a registered business means you must have complied with legal requirements to operate the business. There are no extra legal requirements to operate the business. Finally, most of the respondents (41.7 %) indicated that Safaricom does not provide financial support to their businesses but expects the dealers to raise the requisite capital and procure the relevant technologies to monitor performance of sub agents under their jurisdiction. This could further explain why there were only a few dealers licensed by Safaricom to operate this type of contracts. In general most respondents indicated that the Outsourcing partnerships were very profitable with fair terms. However, the major challenge is on raising the requisite capital investment which was largely unaffordable to most MSEs.

Marketing and Distribution Partnerships:

The fourth objective sought to establish whether marketing and distribution partnerships between MSEs and Safaricom had influenced the growth of their businesses. MSEs targeted were those operating Mkopa distribution businesses in partnership with Safaricom. 82 out of the 126 businesses were found to have these contracts translating to 65.08% of the businesses surveyed. Results are shown in Table 4.

Where **SD**= Strongly Disagree, **D**=Disagree, **N**= Neutral, **A**=Agree, SA= Strongly Agree.

Table 4: Marketing and Distribution Partnerships

Aspects on Marketing and Distribution Partnerships	**n=126** **SD**		**D**		**N**		**A**		**SA**	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Marketing alliance with Safaricom has enabled us to access strong distribution networks	0	0	7	8.5	4	4.9	49	**59.8**	22	26.8
There is good information sharing between our company and Safaricom	0	0	7	8.5	9	11.0	31	37.8	35	**42.7**
We undertake joint marketing planning and joint	0	0	28	34.1	0	0	53	**64.6**	1	1.2

operational control with Safaricom										
Price collaboration with Safaricom has resulted in an increase in customer base	0	0	7	8.5	21	25.6	53	**64.6**	1	1.2
There is a formal agreement to regulate the joint activities in the marketing alliance	0	0	7	8.5	0	0	53	**64.6**	22	26.8
Partnership has enabled us access niche markets in Safaricom networks	0	0	7	8.5	0	0	74	**90.2**	1	1.2
We have acquired innovation, sales promotion and branding skills through Safaricom alliance	0	0	7	8.5	7	8.5	46	**56.1**	22	26.8
There is a high level of commitment and cooperation between our business and Safaricom	0	0	6	7.3	0	0	64	**78.0**	12	14.6

Results as shown in Table 4 indicate that the modal response was agree on seven aspects while one returned a modal response of strongly agree. This implies that these businesses had benefited from the marketing partnerships with Safaricom. On specific aspects; Majority (59.8 %) agreed that marketing alliance with Safaricom had enabled us to access strong distribution networks. Most of the respondents (42.7) strongly agreed that there was good information sharing between their company and Safaricom. Bouka, (2015) opines that forming strategic alliances can allow ready access to knowledge and expertise in an area that a company lacks such as poor promotional skills. On whether their businesses undertook joint marketing planning and joint operational control with Safaricom, 64.6% agreed that this was the case. Majority of the respondents (64.6%) also agreed that price collaboration with Safaricom had resulted in an increase in their customer base. Majority of the respondents (64.6%) also agreed that there was a formal agreement to regulate the joint activities in the marketing alliance with Safaricom. 90.2% of the respondents also agreed that the marketing partnership had enabled them access niche markets in Safaricom networks.

Most of the respondents (56.1%) further agreed that they had acquired innovation, sales promotion and branding skills through Safaricom alliance. While 78.0 of the respondents confirmed that a high level of commitment and cooperation existed between their business and Safaricom. However, in this type of partnerships unlike Mpesa where field staff were Safaricom employees, distributors are required to employ their own sales staff which increases operational expenses.

Measuring Business Growth:

The study also sought to establish whether respondents had registered growth in their businesses as a result of the partnerships in terms of sales, profits and returns on investments.

Table 5: Organizational growth

Aspects on Organizational growth	NA		SE		LE	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Sales have grown significantly in the last 5 years	0	0	45	35.7	81	**64.3**
We have registered a significant growth in profits over the last 5 years	0	0	52	41.5	74	**58.7**
Our returns on investments have grown steadily over the last 5 years	0	0	66	**52.4**	60	47.6

Majority of the respondents indicated that their businesses had grown to a large extent in terms of sales and profits in the last five years as a result of the partnerships. On whether returns on investments had grown, results revealed mixed results whereby 52.4% indicated that this was the case to a small extent while a significant 47.6 % agreed that ROI had grown to a large extent.

Influence of Strategic Partnership on Business Growth:

On specific partnership types, results reveal that each of the partnerships had a positive influence on organizational growth as shown in the cross tabulation in Table 6. Cross tabulations were based on the recommendations of Kothari(2004). In this study a respondent chooses which partnership to engage in and is not obliged to have all. This implies that they were only required to respond on partnership contracts that they had which made chi square test unsuitable.

Where **NA**= Not at all, **SE**=Small Extent, LE=Large Extent

Table 6: Cross Tabulation: Partnership Type By Organizational Growth

Partnership type	Sales have grown significantly in the last 5 years			We have registered a significant growth in profits over the last 5 years			Our returns on investments have grown steadily over the last 5 years			Total
	NA	SE	LE	NA	SE	LE	NA	SE	LE	
Technology Partnership	0	1	**5**	0	2	**4**	0	3	3	6
Franchise partnership	0	41	**74**	0	45	**70**	0	56	**59**	115
Outsourcing partnership	0	10	**14**	0	9	**15**	0	11	**13**	24
Marketing Partnerships	0	34	**48**	0	38	**44**	0	**47**	35	82

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